

UNESCO (IBC), which took place in various Japanese cities during 1995. As one would expect from a collection like this, the quality of the content varies from the extremely interesting to the dully platitudinous. Also, as one would expect from a publication coming from the Eubios Ethics Institute, it provides a fascinating glimpse of the position of medical ethics in Japanese society. For someone such as myself, with a very "Western" background in philosophy, such glimpses are extremely valuable.

The first high spot of this book is the insight into the foundation, background and development of the UNESCO IBC, presented by its president, Noelle Lenoir (pages 12–22). As well as reviewing the historical events leading up to the foundation of the IBC in 1993, this presentation also outlines a particular attitude towards the role of ethics committees and the development of the Declaration of the Protection of the Human Genome.

One of the presentations to involve itself in serious ethical analysis is that by Professor Sakamoto (pages 30–31), which in a very short space raises important questions for Western bioethicists concerning the relevance of such terms as: "human rights" in relation to genetic manipulation, and the role Asian values (such as the relatively weak conception of human dignity) might play in reformulating our normal ethical standpoints. This is the value of this sort of publication, which raises questions for Western bioethicists, not from within our own culture, but from a completely different tradition, forcing us to question our beliefs.

Many other articles though, are disappointing in their unquestioning attitude towards the current regulations regarding the human genome. One gets the impression that if their authors were asked about the title of this book: "What *are* the responsibilities of scientists with regard to the human genome?", the reply would come back: "To do what they're told, and stick to the letter of the regulations". I am not suggesting that scientists should not obey regulations concerning human genetics; I am more concerned that there was not more questioning amongst such distinguished participants of the basis for the received wisdom behind such regulations. For example, one paper states that "Since the cosmetic medicine is practised widely we have to be very careful not to introduce the gene therapy in the area of cosmetic medicine" (page 26); but why is this distinction

drawn between "normal" cosmetic medicine (which is presumably ethical, since it is "practised widely"), and "genetic" cosmetic medicine? There may be very good reasons for not introducing gene therapy for cosmetic reasons, but they are not presented in any way other than "concern not to inherit the genetic changes induced by gene therapy to the next generation" (page 26). The reasons behind this concern are not enunciated. For a philosopher, it is frustrating to read of ethical positions being presented as *a priori* facts, with little or no discussion of the implications and the basis for such positions. To be fair, it appears that the structure of the seminars gave little opportunity for lengthy discussion after papers were presented, so it may be harsh to complain of the lack of fuller discussions.

The two quotations may suggest the grounds for my complaint with this book. With so many articles by non-native English speakers, it really does require careful copy-editing and proof-reading to render the articles into easily understandable English. This is not linguistic bias, but a necessary requirement for any publication which is trying to deal with a topic such as ethics, where the precise meaning of words is vital. For example, in one of the panel discussions Noelle Lenoir of the IBC states that with international conventions "we can reach a consensus, and pacify a subject" (page 39). Now if this actually means "pacify" in the same way this word is usually used in English, then such a statement requires considerable debate; would we ever really want consensus to "pacify" a topic of discussion, to silence all dissenting voices? But I suspect that if this was the word used in the discussion, it was intended to mean something rather different. The true, intended meaning should have been brought out in the editing process. Since this book is full of many such linguistic ambiguities I would not feel comfortable citing articles from it; I would be afraid of unintentionally misattributing certain positions to authors because of the lack of linguistic clarity of the text.

This book is an interesting and valuable read, but it is also frustratingly full of translation errors which inhibit full confidence in the reader as regards the authors' intended meanings.

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## Reproducing Persons. Issues in Feminist Bioethics

Laura M Purdy, Ithaca and London,  
Cornell University Press, 1996,  
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The essays contained in this collection represent previously published work spanning both Purdy's career and what she calls the twenty-year period of intense growth and specialisation in the discipline of bioethics (page vii). They are linked by a new introduction, exploring the "relatively uncharted" connections between bioethics and a feminist ethics, which seeks to document how existing practices harm women unjustifiably and focuses on how to avoid such outcomes (page 19). In this volume bioethics is castigated both for its preoccupation with arcane metaethical questions (page 3) and its tendency to launch from one crisis issue to the next without addressing underlying issues (page 236). Bioethicists are accused of being entrenched in a technological wonderland which promises a quick fix to reproductive problems (page 237). Purdy's overarching thesis is that there is insufficient dialogue between "even a relatively moderate feminist stance", and what she refers to as the "bioethics establishment". This she attacks for its systematic marginalisation of feminist concerns (page 233), which is particularly unjustifiable given that:

"[W]omen are especially at risk in the medical establishment: erroneous or self-interested assumptions about our bodies and minds are close to the surface here, and the delivery of care is so value laden that it cannot help but reflect them . . . there is no 'safe' neutral territory between biased bioethics and feminist bioethics" (page 18).

She argues that bioethics has much to gain from a more fruitful engagement with feminism, emphasising that feminist concerns are not partisan and that gender is not just about women. She is, however, also critical of many feminist positions. For instance, she accuses radical feminists of inconsistency in regarding contraception and abortion as innocuous but conceptive technologies as dangerous (page 202). In her view, their hostility to assisted conception fails to take account of the needs of women who are infertile, single or gay; and replicates traditional sexist attitudes by rejecting women's desires as

unreasonable without adequate consideration of possible compromises (pages 203–4). Purdy also contests the widespread feminist reliance on caring as a supreme ethical principle, arguing that its narrow focus may exclude awareness of the socio-political context crucial to good moral reasoning (page 23). She suggests that some feminist writers exaggerate the harmony between maternal and fetal interests, and that this is unhelpful when those interests truly diverge (page 92). In similar vein, she is critical of the focus in feminist writing on the moral difficulty of abortion decisions and its stress on both the desperation and altruism of women seeking abortions (page 143). She blames such intellectual strategies for the defensive and negative character of feminist debates on abortion. Similarly, she expresses concern about prevailing discourses on collaborative technologies, suggesting that the images of womanhood on which many feminist criticisms rest derive from a disconcerting appeal to nature (page 201). Finally, she eschews the utopianism which is sometimes discernible in feminist theorising. By contrast, she seeks to ground her own work in the reality of women's lives, arguing that following rules which would make sense in a feminist world may lead to very different results in the sexist world we currently inhabit (page 51). Consequently, she argues that we must resist the lure of technological fixes and never lose our grounding in the real world of limited resources and pervasive discrimination. This entails a recognition that in the general scheme of things, human misery is most efficiently reduced by concentrating on noxious socio-political arrangements. Of course, such contentions leave Purdy open, as she acknowledges, to the charge of politicising bioethics. However, she contends that feminist perspectives are too frequently disqualified by being labelled political: "I believe that the epithet 'political' here is an attempt to preserve the domestic realm and gender matters in general from moral scrutiny" (page 10).

Purdy's work is influenced by a utilitarian perspective as well as a feminist one. Arguing that the classification of utilitarianism with traditional individualistic theories is erroneous, she suggests commonalities between feminism and utilitarianism. Not only are both theories frequently shunned by the bioethics establishment, but both are context-sensitive, demand that the interests of all parties affected by an action be taken into account, and require that alternatives to a given

action be thoroughly explored (page 26). Thus she finds it surprising that utilitarianism has not informed recent work on feminist ethics, and suggests the practical advantages of drawing on some established ethical principles, given the overwhelming task confronting feminism (page 34).

Purdy acknowledges that her utilitarian/feminist-inspired work, in attempting to find tenable compromises, may give the appearance of contradiction and incoherence, and attract the charge of *ad hoc* accommodation (page 37). Nevertheless, her work is characterised by a readiness to confront difficult issues, on many of which she is uncompromising. For instance, on abortion she charges supporters of the "pro-life" position with irrationality, contends that nothing less than abortion on demand will suffice, and condemns attempts to seek a middle ground – "[a]lthough moderate positions on abortion rights are both intuitively plausible and politically convenient, it has proved difficult to justify them coherently" (page 128). With regard to reproductive technologies, her aim is to explore how these might empower women. Although she acknowledges feminist concerns about collaborative reproduction, she suggests that this is a reason for proceeding with caution and insisting on the need for strict regulation to protect the interests of women who participate, rather than outright rejection (page 201). On the issue of inter-generational justice and rights to reproduce, she argues that the crucial question is the moral one of whether it is right to reproduce. She contends that in some circumstances – for instance, where there is a high risk of transmitting a serious disease or defect like Huntington's chorea, it is simply wrong to have children (page 41).

However, whilst rigorously defending the positions she adopts, and acknowledging that some situations, such as disputes between a pregnant woman seeking abortion and her partner who wishes to father a child, admit of no compromise (page 165), her emphasis is on finding ways to prevent conflict arising. Thus, on the topical issue of forced caesareans, she stresses the importance of avoiding radical interventions at a late stage in pregnancy by focusing instead on the provision of prenatal care:

"Until we as a society act to make good, inexpensive, convenient, and respectful care a priority, punishing women for lack of prenatal care reeks

of hypocrisy . . . it is cheaper to furnish good prenatal care than caesareans, jail, neonatal intensive care or lifetime care for damaged babies" (page 100).

Her work is at its strongest in highlighting these contextual issues. On abortion, she is scathing about those who decry late or "convenient" abortions, pointing to the broader context in which our society tolerates hundreds of thousands of deaths each year for reasons of "convenience" such as our over-dependence on motor cars (page 145).

Through such contextualisation, this volume represents a major challenge to the premises, practices and assumptions embedded in the discipline of bioethics and is thus an important addition to bioethics literature. It challenges not only the "bioethics establishment" (which is not very clearly identified), but also feminists of many different persuasions, and writers such as John Robertson who have been influenced by feminist theorising. Given its merits, my criticisms are relatively minor. In my view, some of Purdy's claims seem dubious or at least over-stated. For instance, it may now be stretching a point to claim that mainstream debate in reproductive technologies seldom reflects issues raised by feminist literature (page 2) or that "[n]o-one – not the scientific mainstream, not conservatives, not progressives – seems particularly concerned about the potential consequences of the new technologies for women" (page 75). Although her broader claim that bioethics has stubbornly resisted feminist arguments is surely correct, these specific claims seem a little outdated. As a consequence, Purdy's own position is occasionally represented as rather more ground-breaking than may actually be the case. Other disadvantages are inherent in the format of collected essays. Hence some themes are reiterated too constantly, and it might have been wise to delete or rewrite a couple of the shorter chapters which have the appearance of being wrenched from the original dialogues of which they formed part. Overall, however, the collection is thought-provoking, stimulating and engaging. It provides an excellent source of references and is impeccably researched and indexed, while Purdy's arguments are pursued with an intellectual rigour which makes them difficult to resist.

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